

NETWORK NEWS

FOR OWNERS AND MANAGERS OF HUD INSURED AND ASSISTED HOUSING

DELIVERING TECHNOLOGY ACCESS TO AMERICA'S COMMUNITIES

Afterschool Programs Benefit Youth, Parents, and Community

School-age children spending larger periods of time in unsupervised settings is a growing trend in America. In many communities, Neighborhood Networks centers, school districts, and community-based organizations are working together to establish academic and nonacademic enrichment programs for these children. The programs are one of the pillars of the Neighborhood Networks initiative to strengthen communities and provide increased opportunities for residents. More than 200 Neighborhood Networks centers engage in afterschool activities that are designed to enrich the lives of schoolchildren, offer a safe environment, and extend learning opportunities beyond the classroom. The centers offer children and their families youth development programs, drug- and violence-prevention programs, counseling programs, and art, music, literacy, technology, and recreational activities designed to reinforce and complement the regular schoolday activities.

Afterschool programs in centers in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, and Grand Forks, North Dakota, are successful because of the managers' initiative and their dedication to ensuring a safe environment for school-age children.

Southfield Townhouses in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, operates a center that offers afterschool tutoring, a summer reading program, and computer classes. First Realty Management, with the assistance of Silver Lake College, established the Neighborhood Networks Learning Center in June 2002 to provide a broad array of services and activities for all ages. The program and activities focus on afterschool tutoring and computer classes but are supplemented by a summer reading program.

The Grand Forks Housing Authority recently started the Continental Homes Center afterschool program and is continuing to build upon its success at the LaGrave Learning Center. The LaGrave center is owned by Grand Forks Homes, Inc., a local faith-based

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2004 Issue 1



U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of Multifamily Housing Programs
www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org



Grand Forks Homes, Inc., saw the value of these programs and worked with us to develop the LaGrave Center and the new one at Continental Homes. It deserves much of the credit for their willingness to do what it takes to meet the needs of children and families.

*Craig Knudsvig,
client services manger,
Grand Forks Housing Authority*



coalition dedicated to providing housing to low-income families, the elderly, and disabled individuals.


With financial help from a 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) federal grant—a program of the U.S. Department of Education—and working with the local school districts, the housing authority identified creative solutions to overcome service delivery and funding problems. “We confronted some major obstacles establishing the programs,” relates Craig Knudsvig, client services manager at the Grand Forks Housing Authority. Two local school districts wanted to establish afterschool programs but did not meet eligibility requirements to receive 21st CCLC funds. Working with the housing authority, the partnership was able to address the income requirement and population density problems that it faced. The strategy worked, and the partners were awarded a 5-year grant that began in the 2003–04 school year.

“The program started small in the early 1990s and evolved into the facility that we have today,” states Knudsvig. In 1991 the housing authority identified a number of local children who would benefit from structured afterschool activities, and then purchased a used mobile home and converted the space into a facility that housed its developing program. Working with the local park district, the housing authority found the necessary expertise and labor to start the program. As the program evolved, the housing authority secured a portion of the city’s Community Development Block Grant to fund construction of the LaGrave Learning Center, which now houses the afterschool program and the Neighborhood Networks computer lab.

The center is occasionally confronted with operating problems but has found ways to address funding barriers. In the past, the center tried to attract volunteers to support program staff, charged minimal fees for some of their computer classes, and applied to be a federal work-study site. To raise additional funds, the center now refurbishes donated computer equipment and sells it at low prices to local residents. “The equipment is not top of the line, but it can be used for word processing or basic Internet use,” states Knudsvig.

The issues that the center faced in fundraising and operations are unique to its situation but provide useful lessons for other organizations contemplating the addition of an afterschool program. “The methods to overcome each barrier are dependent upon the community’s size,” relates Knudsvig. “Personal relationships developed

More than 200 Neighborhood Networks centers engage in afterschool activities designed to enrich the lives of school-children, offer a safe environment, and extend learning opportunities beyond the classroom.

over time are an effective way to ensure that resources are available when you need them.” The housing authority and the center have established and fostered a long-term relationship with the University of North Dakota (UND) that is beneficial to all partners. “It has been several years since we were without some type of student intern or volunteer presence from UND,” states Knudsvig, adding, “establishing situations where everyone benefits is what we try to accomplish to ensure that we all reach our goals.” 

For more information about the LaGrave Neighborhood Networks center’s afterschool program, contact:

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Consortia: Strength in Numbers

A consortium can provide groups of organizations with an opportunity to strengthen the capacity of all participating organizations and undertake an enterprise that is beyond the resources of any single member. This four-part series will explore what consortia are and the benefits that they can provide, explain how to start a consortium and recruit members, highlight suggestions for marketing your consortium, and describe strategies for sustaining your consortium.

In the case of HUD’s Multifamily Housing Programs Neighborhood Networks initiative, a consortium is composed of a group of centers and community partners in the same geographic area that collaborate to expand opportunities for their users. In general, the formation of a consortium can improve access to resources, increase networking opportunities, and enhance operational efficiency. Consortia have different structures—some are independent organizations with their own staff, whereas others are informal groups of centers that meet regularly to exchange ideas and information. Community partners—colleges and technical schools, businesses, government agencies, and service providers—are critical consortium members whose funds, expertise, and other resources enrich and sustain the group’s activities.

Consortia strengthen and sustain individual Neighborhood Networks centers by offering them services, savings, and other benefits.



Working with its partners, Digital Promise—a Neighborhood Networks consortium located in the Pacific Northwest—has helped start and maintain more than 50 computer labs and has distributed an estimated \$100,000 in hardware, equipment, software, and technical assistance. For the past 5 years, Digital Promise has secured Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA) volunteers to help staff consortia activities. Digital Promise has also expanded its partnerships and funding sources to include the Washington State Housing Finance Commission, the Affordable Housing Management Association, the Corporation for National Service, and the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods.

Consortia strengthen and sustain individual Neighborhood Networks centers by offering services, savings, and other benefits including the following:

- **Shared resources, including staff, training, programming materials, and marketing.** Consortia offer Neighborhood Networks centers and their partners regular opportunities to exchange program ideas, successful practices, and curricula and to discuss solutions to common problems. Consortia can also share staff and program resources among centers and develop training and programming that otherwise may not be available to individual centers. Finally, consortia create opportunities to combine resources for marketing and media outreach.

In February 2003, the Alabama Neighborhood Networks Consortium (ANNC) held a grant-writing workshop for centers planning to apply for computer equipment from the Beaumont Foundation of America. “Our goal for the day is to put together a proposal framework that each center can complete by the March 31st deadline,” said ANNC President Frewin Osteen. After reviewing grant-writing basics in the morning, the workshop moved into a computer lab where participants accessed the Beaumont Foundation’s online application and began drafting their proposals. “[Helping] member organizations to become and remain self-sustaining is what ANNC is all about,” emphasized Osteen. “We are always on the lookout for opportunities that support both ANNC and its member centers. The Beaumont Foundation of America grant was just such an opportunity.”

- **Access to 501(c)(3) status, funding opportunities, and partnerships often unavailable to single centers.** Neighborhood Networks centers without nonprofit status can acquire it by joining a registered nonprofit consortium, thereby increasing their

We are always on the lookout for opportunities that support both ANNC and its member centers.


*Frewin Osteen, president,
Alabama Neighborhood
Networks Consortium*

eligibility for many local and national grants. Equally important, potential funders often prefer supporting larger community-based projects rather than smaller ones such as those undertaken by a Neighborhood Networks center.

ANNC shares its VISTA volunteers with its members. Since fundraising is a challenge, especially for small or new centers, ANNC sponsored a “Letters from Santa” project to help raise a \$9,000 local match for each VISTA volunteer. By rotating the VISTA volunteers at centers throughout the state, ANNC is able to help understaffed centers by teaching computer classes or staffing other activities. The VISTA volunteers also research additional resources—grants, companies donating computers and software—to help expand the capacity of ANNC’s member centers.

- **Networking/mentoring.** Through consortia membership, Neighborhood Networks centers can network with other centers, community technology organizations, and potential partners. This is particularly advantageous for centers geographically isolated from other centers and for new centers, which can benefit from the experiences of veteran centers.

Digital Promise holds monthly brown-bag lunches to bring owners, managers, center directors, and volunteers together to hear from local businesses and nonprofit groups about their products and services. These meetings also give property owners and managers opportunities to exchange ideas and discuss common problems.

Joining or starting a Neighborhood Networks consortium offers considerable benefits to both the centers and the surrounding community. The success of the consortium, however, requires a well-planned startup and considerable support during its initial development and growth. 

For more information about Neighborhood Networks consortia:

- Go to the Neighborhood Networks Web site:
www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org.
- E-mail: neighborhoodnetworks@hud.gov.
- Call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center toll free:
(888) 312-2743.

Technology Trends: Wireless Fidelity (Wi-Fi)

Moving computers connected to a local area network (LAN) can be a time-consuming and stressful endeavor. Even relocating one computer can require excessive time and money to establish a new server connection. LAN-dependent organizations are quickly learning about a technology that can eliminate these hassles and limitations. Wi-Fi—short for wireless fidelity—is becoming a serious tool for those seeking freedom in their computer connectivity.


Introduced in the late 1990s, Wi-Fi allows users to connect to other computers or the Internet through radio signals sent to an established base station. With an average range of 100 to 300 feet when used indoors and as much as 2,000 feet when used outdoors, these base stations can eliminate endless miles of wire and the need to add additional server ports.

Wi-Fi—short for wireless fidelity—is becoming a serious tool for those seeking freedom in their computer connectivity.

The cost- and time-efficient benefits of Wi-Fi's wireless LAN (WLAN) are also commendable. Community technology centers interested in creating their own WLAN can purchase base stations for less than \$100. One base station can typically support 15 to 20 users, but this number is affected by the users' activities. Checking e-mail requires minimal bandwidth, whereas downloading and working with large files may reduce the number of users a base station can accommodate.

Adding a desktop system to the WLAN is as simple as installing a Wi-Fi compatible card or USB adapter and loading the accompanying software. Cards can cost up to \$50, and USB adapters can cost less than \$20. Wi-Fi equipment is compatible with high-speed Internet connections, which means that several computers can benefit from a single high-speed connection broadcast through the base station.

Wi-Fi does raise security concerns. Radio signals can be intercepted by outside sources, allowing access to potentially sensitive information. Wi-Fi's overseeing organization, the Wi-Fi Alliance, requires manufacturers to adhere to stringent wireless specifications, including providing information encryption capabilities with all Wi-Fi-certified equipment. Combined with other security features, such as firewall software, the encryption component provides a strong defense against security breaches.

Centers interested in learning more about Wi-Fi technology, including how to create their own WLAN, should visit the Wi-Fi Alliance's Web site at www.wifialliance.com. 

Connect to Continuing Education

I started with the local yellow pages and called schools' admissions offices to find what programs they offered.

*—Tammy Kitchings,
Shreveport Housing Authority*

Interested in offering more programs to help residents earn general equivalency diplomas (GEDs), college degrees, or professional certification? How about onsite classes in financial literacy, building assets, improving credit ratings, or homebuying?

To help owners and managers find program resources for adult education and training, a Neighborhood Networks center director shares her strategies for securing public and private resources for adult education. Tammy Kitchings directs the Shreveport Housing Authority Career Center and the Goodman Plaza Neighborhood Networks Center in Louisiana.

Shreveport Career Center

"I started with 'colleges and universities' in the local yellow pages and called schools' admissions offices to find what programs they offered. If a particular program sounded interesting for our residents, I made an appointment to talk with the college official in charge of that program," says Kitchings. This cold-call approach worked and mushroomed into an impressive menu of quality education and vocational programs. Some operate onsite and others are available through the career center's local partners.

GED program. Southern University agreed to provide GED programs, including assessments, computer tutorials, and practice tests, onsite at the career center. There is no charge to residents for the GED preparation program, and if they pass a pretest, the university covers the \$40 GED exam fee.

Career training. Louisiana Technical College offers residents opportunities to apply for many career and vocational programs—Cisco Career Certification and other professional programs such as barber/stylists, culinary arts, graphic design, automotive repair, carpentry, HVAC maintenance, and early childhood education. For eligible residents, the college uses Technical Assistance for Needy Families funds for students' tuition, childcare, and transportation expenses. The career center helps residents apply online for admission to the college's programs. Because many residents need

I called some local temporary employment agencies to find out what word processing skills were in greatest demand by employers in this area.

—Tammy Kitchings

computer training before completing their application, the center also offers computer classes. “Once residents enroll at the college, career center staff will monitor their progress and provide any additional support needed to succeed,” Kitchings says.

Computer classes. “I called some local temporary employment agencies to find out what word processing skills were in greatest demand by employers in this area. They told me that businesses were hiring people who knew Word, Excel, Access, and Quick-Books,” Kitchings continues, “and that is how we decided what computer classes to offer.” In addition to these more advanced classes, the career center provides basic computer skills classes and helps residents complete online job and school applications.

According to Kitchings, to cover the cost of center computer instructors, the Shreveport Housing Authority used funds from the Resident Opportunities and Self-Sufficiency Program, a HUD grant.

Additional Resources for Continuing Education

Career Training

One-Stop Centers. The Department of Labor’s (DOL’s) nationwide network of One-Stop Centers consolidates access to jobs and employment services under one roof. Although programs vary among sites, all One-Stop Centers provide the following core programs:

- Skills assessment.
- Career counseling.
- Job search and placement assistance.
- Labor market information.
- Unemployment insurance.
- Supportive services, such as transportation and daycare.
- GED programs.

As part of their Neighborhood Networks national partnership, HUD and DOL have developed an Internet link (<http://www.nbpjobs.org/misc/neighbor.asp>) that will take Neighborhood Networks center computers directly to a personalized One-Stop Career Web site, where residents will find information on the closest One-Stop Center, public transportation availability, center hours, and the resources available at the center.

To find out more about DOL programs:

Call the toll-free help line: (877) US2JOBS or
TTY: (877) 889-5627.

Go to DOL's new portal Web site for jobseekers—CareerOneStop (<http://www.careeronestop.org>)—for additional career sites.

- **America's Job Bank** (<http://www.ajb.dni.us>) lists over a million jobs nationwide. Center participants can search for jobs (by category, by ZIP Code, by state, or by city) and post resumes electronically to reach employers all across the country. There are also tools to help jobseekers create resumes and cover letters for prospective employers.
- **America's Service Locator** (<http://www.servicelocator.org>) helps centers locate employment and training services, as well as One-Stop Centers, in their area and nationwide.
- **America's Career InfoNet** (<http://www.acinet.org/acinet>) gives wages and employment trends, occupational requirements, state-by-state labor market conditions, millions of employer contacts nationwide, and an extensive online career resource library that includes nearly 360 career videos (<http://www.acinet.org/acinet/library.asp?category=1.2>) showing people in actual work situations.




Homeownership Education

Both HUD and the Fannie Mae Foundation provide materials that centers can download or order at no cost.

HUD's Homeownership Web site (<http://www.hud.gov/initiatives/homeownership/index.cfm>) has user-friendly, comprehensive materials to make homebuying less complicated: an online homebuying education program, housing counseling agencies listed by geographic area and in English and Spanish, predatory lending information, settlement procedures, and homeownership workshops available in your community.

Fannie Mae Foundation (<http://www.fanniemae.foundation.org/programs/hbg.shtml>) has developed a series of free guides in nine languages for limited-income families interested in buying homes. Topics include mortgages, credit, borrowing, and local housing counseling programs.

Financial Literacy

Money Smart (<http://www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart/index.html>). The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) created the Money Smart training program to help adults outside the financial mainstream enhance their money skills and create positive banking relationships. FDIC encourages banks to work with community groups, like Neighborhood Networks centers, to deliver financial education using the Money Smart curriculum. To order a free copy of the Money Smart program (available in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Korean), go to the Money Smart curriculum online order form (<http://www2.fdic.gov/moneysmartregister/index.asp>) on FDIC's Web site. 

NETWORKNEWS

Network News is published electronically by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Office of Multi-family Housing Programs. Additional copies may be downloaded at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org. For more information about Neighborhood Networks, contact the Information Center toll free at (888) 312-2734.

Calendar of Events

Conference Calls

December 16, 2003

Capturing Grant Funds: What the Funders Tell Us

This conference call will feature a discussion with a grant manager from a prominent foundation who will discuss the foundation's priorities, application guidelines, and common errors made by grant seekers.

January 27, 2004

Expanding Entrepreneurship: Considerations for Microenterprise Development

Encouraging microenterprise development is an objective of the Neighborhood Networks initiative. To support the efforts of centers contemplating this endeavor, this conference call will focus on some of the business and regulatory considerations that should be factored into the decisionmaking process.

February 24, 2004

Expanding Business Knowledge for Neighborhood Networks Centers With 501(c)(3) Status

Business practices and the nonprofit rules and regulations that govern them are constantly changing. This conference call will provide information about such diverse topics as Unrelated Business Income Tax (UBIT), DUNS numbers, filing 990s, and other business and tax information.

Upcoming Conferences Where Neighborhood Networks Is Exhibiting

December 5–6, 2003

4th Annual Asset Management Professionals' Conference
San Francisco, CA

March 14–16, 2004

National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB)
Washington, DC